

House Joint Resolution 34
March 28, 2007
Presented by M. Jeff Hagener
Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Jeff Hagener, Director for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here today to provide testimony in support of HJR 34.

The Big Horn River is consistently among the top five most fished waters in Montana. It is estimated the annual economic impact from anglers is approximately thirty million dollars for the local economy. For many years the Bureau of Reclamation, which operates Yellowtail Dam, has worked with representatives from Wyoming and Montana to develop an annual operating plan for the dam that protects the interests of both states and provides flow for hydroelectric generation. Last summer a contingent of folks from Wyoming began an attack on the process and Big Horn River flows in Montana. They were seeking to have flows in the Big Horn dropped to 1,000 cubic feet per second. The intent was to preserve water in the reservoir for marinas in Wyoming.

Historically, the operating plan for the Yellowtail Dam established the minimum flow for the Big Horn River at 2,500 cubic feet per second. This flow allows fish to fully access the side-channels of the river critical to trout spawning and rearing. In drought years the flow has gone to 1,500 cfs with significant declines in the fish population, the larger fish especially are very scarce at this flow. A drop to 1,000 cfs would be devastating to the fish population.

This resolution, combined with the efforts of local anglers should help protect the Big Horn from the raids by our neighbors to the south.